

Equipping the Church to Vote

Exercising Christian Citizenship in a Church Environment

By Frank Kacer

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Preface

Throughout my Christian walk, my convictions have strengthened concerning the powerful influence believers exert for good, but my concerns have deepened for the amazing number of apathetic believers that prefer to remain in their “holy cocoon”. We enjoy incredible freedoms in this nation, and as Christians I believe we have a duty to be godly citizens, not just for our own good, but also for the good of everyone.

Eight years ago I began questioning the role of church leadership in equipping believers to be responsible citizens. Little did I know that today my primary ministry would be educating believers (pastors and members) about “Christian Citizenship” – the active engaging of society, our culture, and our government at all levels with a Biblical worldview well grounded with facts and clear reasoning. In saying this, I realize “politics” is but one of many areas we’re called to influence as we live our lives to honor Christ.

During this time I’ve been privileged to serve on the Elder Board of Grace Bible Church of Escondido California, where godly men ensured I kept proper balance in teaching members to be Christ-honoring citizens. I also had the privilege of participating in a Home Bible Study and Christian Citizenship Planning Group that addressed citizenship issues. Each was made up of sharp minds, inquisitive attitudes, challenging questions, and hearts that dearly love the Lord.

From these associations, and the loving support of my dear, patient wife Lynn, the material in this pamphlet was conceived and written. It’s my prayerful desire it may show leadership in other churches some practical ways to equip Christians to apply Biblical principles to citizenship duties. Indeed, as we look around us and consider what the Lord would have us do, may we become encouraged to be like the men of Issachar:

“...who understood the times and knew what Israel should do.”
(1 Chron 12:32)

Frank Kacer
September, 2002

Introduction

The target audience for this pamphlet is primarily the leadership (pastors, elders) within a church, and secondly the membership. Its focus is specifically on providing practical advice on how a church can organize and conduct what I refer to as an *Election Pre-View Evening*. The actual mechanics for doing this are contained in Chapter 8, with the other Chapters addressing a variety of related issues that leadership, and church members will undoubtedly encounter along the way. This is not a theological treatise, but a middle ground approach to a confused area of church ministry that I trust will appeal to both leadership and church members.

Each Chapter is intended to be a short, standalone treatment of questions that normally come up when the question is asked: What role should a church play in politics? By addressing these specifically, I intend to equip both church leadership and membership with a reasonable level of information to make both comfortable with doing “something”. For instance, do we have a Biblical mandate to engage society and politics (see Chapter 3), do Christians vote any different than non-Christians (see Chapter 4), what can a church do legally and what should they be careful of (see Chapter 5), why is it believers can’t agree on major decisions (see Chapter 6), what should we be looking for in a candidate (see Chapter 7), why can’t I just use voter guides (see Chapter 9), what else should we be doing (see Chapters 10 & 11), and finally, if you think you have valid excuses for not doing anything, try out Chapter 12.

I took the liberty of writing letters to both pastors and church members at the beginning of this pamphlet. I encourage you to read both because I believe it’s important to understand the different perspectives each group will have. The greater the unity of the Spirit we develop in fulfilling our citizenship responsibilities as Christians in this nation, the greater the influence we will exert for the glory of Jesus Christ. This is my prayer.

1 ***A Letter to Pastors***

I know exactly what you're thinking. You're already overburdened with ministry demands and don't need another major complication added to your pastoral duties. I understand your concern, and my intention is not to "pile on the pastor". My intention with this pamphlet is to present a short treatment of Christian Citizenship, and provide practical steps to help you and your flock fulfill their calling in this ministry area.

Most of us would agree the purpose of the church gathered is to bring glory to God by worshipping Him, praying His will to be manifest, and exercising the spiritual gifts He gives for works of service. The church scattered, however, is to bring glory to God by proclaiming the gospel, living exemplary lives, and applying Biblical principles and a Christian worldview to all spheres of life. A difficulty with the last statement is when Christians are not equipped to apply a Biblical worldview directly to our culture and society. When we fail in this arena, when we stop being "salt" in this nation, I believe we inadvertently encourage moral decay to go unchecked, contribute to the commonly held view Biblical truths are irrelevant to cultural problems, and give the impression that Christians are ignorant of matters important to the nation. Is it any wonder we see such an abominable state of affairs all around us.

Although true and lasting change in society will only occur through the gospel and redeemed lives, I believe the Bible holds the basic truths and principles this nation and society desperately need for their, and our own good. God's word is clear; it provides all we need to address issues of faith and practice. God has also provided for mankind's good by giving us Biblical truths and principles of life and justice that reap rich blessings when thoughtfully applied, and dire consequences when ignored. This includes the proper role of government, who should rule over us, what constitutes just laws, and even what justice is. As a matter of fact, the liberties we still enjoy are a result of Biblical principles being applied in the very founding of our nation and the creation of its form of government.

Unfortunately, over the last generation or two, many Christians have withdrawn from their high calling to be leaders in our culture, and to some extent have abdicated their many-faceted opportunity to be "salt and light" in the world. A comfortable church environment has become a "holy

huddle”, removed from the difficult complexities we face in everyday discussions and decisions relating to any number of societal or national issues. On the leadership side, many churches have stopped preaching and teaching on “sensitive” topics to ensure a seeker friendly atmosphere that doesn’t unsettle the flock. This gradual slide has resulted in the virtual disappearance of the concept of a Christian Citizen equipped to actively engage his environment, not just with the gospel, but with facts, figures, reasoning and the under-girding that comes from a solid Biblical foundation. This withdrawal (or abdication) is now to the point where a person can be openly condemned as unqualified for public office solely if they espouse any sincere Christian convictions at all. Contrast this with what John Jay, our nation’s first Supreme Court Chief Justice said:

“Providence has given to our people the choice of their rulers, and it is the duty...of our Christian nation to select and prefer Christians for their rulers.”

Given this environment, what is our duty? I am convinced we as believing citizens are to help ensure godly, just governance through promoting righteous laws and the election of honorable leaders. Both of these are within our potential to provide and dramatically impact. Our nation is built upon the fundamental principle of people choosing who is to rule over them. This choice, as well as voting on ballot measures directly, helps define what constitutes justice, what is wise or unwise, and ultimately what standard will be used to articulate what is good or evil. Though not the overriding purpose of a church, I believe the equipping of believers to responsibly cast their vote during elections is one component of a pastor’s responsibility to the flock. Is this mixing politics with religion – you bet! But it must be done in an orderly, Christ-honoring way. As Charles H. Spurgeon said,

“I often hear it said, ‘Do not bring religion into politics.’ This is precisely where it ought to be brought! We have had enough clever men without conscience. Now let us see what honest, God-fearing men will do.”

This booklet is intended to provide practical means to assist a pastor and his church members to become better trained in applying their Christian testimony to election issues. Specifically, very simple, practical ideas on how to conduct what I call an ***Election Pre-View Evening*** are outlined.

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Don't worry, it's not a call to form a Political Action Committee, it doesn't advocate a church taking a formal stance on a particular candidate for office, it doesn't put a church at risk relative to their 501(c)3 status, and it doesn't give all the answers that need to be worked out for each and every election.

What it does do, however, is assist Pastors specifically, and their flocks generally, to answer their call to their rightful place as counselors to the nation. Voting, in my mind, is the absolute minimum that a Christian can do to be this counselor. If nothing else, I believe a pastor must at least strongly encourage his flock to exercise this duty for the good of all – but to do it in a knowledgeable, informed and persuasive manner. I can guarantee if you implement what this pamphlet outlines, your comfort zone will be disrupted. I can guarantee you'll wrestle with issues you have consciously or unconsciously overlooked in the past. I can also guarantee your maturity, leadership, and knowledge will be a key component to whatever is ultimately accomplished. Finally, whether the outcome is what you expected or not, you'll demonstrate that even elections fall under the Lordship of Jesus Christ just as all the rest of life does.

My prayer is that believers, and particularly pastors, will stop “cursing the darkness” and begin to engage the obvious darkness settling around us. I know from experience that virtually all pastors are overburdened with existing ministry concerns. But I can almost guarantee every church has members that are gifted and willing to take up the task of following through on the suggestions contained in this pamphlet. Look for them, you'll find them. I believe one of your responsibilities as a shepherd to the flock is to encourage them to exercise their spiritual gifts and become involved, and then to provide oversight so that all will be done in a manner pleasing to Almighty God.

May your shepherding efforts result in great works being accomplished for the honor of Christ, and may all be done in an orderly manner with godly balance.

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2 *A Letter to Church Members*

I know why you're taking the time to look through this pamphlet. You're wondering why everyone isn't as involved in addressing society's issues and promoting godly candidates as you are. And you're looking for ways to stimulate those around you to catch the same vision you have. What you're doing is undoubtedly commendable. You obviously have a heart to honor the Lord and restore righteousness to the public marketplace. In your zeal, however, I want to give you several warnings.

The first is that your pastor is not necessarily called to be as involved in this part of our Christian witness as you are. Pastors have a tremendous responsibility ministering to the flock entrusted into their care. They already work long hours and typically wrestle non-stop with very difficult spiritual concerns. They don't have the time or energy to take on another major undertaking such as is implied by this pamphlet. What they need are mature, faithful workers to assist them in accomplishing what is laid out in this pamphlet.

A second warning is that those who are very focused on a specific social/cultural issue may not have the necessary breadth of experience or desire to coordinate the broad issues an election affords. If you fall into that category, humbly look for those that are a little broader in interests and abilities, and work to help them as much as you can. Don't forget though, you are still needed, and your zeal (with knowledge) is critical to the success of anything that will be attempted. If your particular area of concern is not a primary focus of the upcoming election, it will undoubtedly become an issue in some other arena and require your energy and insights.

Third, remember that whatever is attempted, must be to bring glory to Jesus Christ first. For this, we must always test our own motives, our tactics, and our heart before the Lord. Beyond this, whatever is done must be in a manner that is submissive to the leadership within your church. God has placed leadership over you for a purpose, to ensure all is pursued in a manner that brings great merit to the honor of God, and is done in an orderly fashion. You may become frustrated at times if your pastor doesn't give you the attention you desire, or the enthusiastic encouragement you need. But remember, political involvement is not his first calling, and it may take time for him to warm to the critical importance of the flock to be equipped

to be godly Christian citizens. You then, must be patient and understanding, and work with him, beside him, and not against him.

Fourth, we're to have the proper attitude towards others. There'll be some who will not accept this as the right thing to do within the walls of a church building. Others may be zealots for activism, far beyond your own energy levels. Whomever you encounter, you must take care to not look down on those who have greater or lesser political involvement than yourself. Your challenge, also, is to try to not create offense or division when sharing your political or cultural views. Its one thing to sharpen each other as iron, it's quite another to be contentious. May the sharpening be the attribute describing you.

Finally, you are called to be a faithful witness to God's truths, and to be diligent in fulfilling the salt and light mandate in this area as well as every other area of your life. Don't become discouraged if progress is slow in mustering support and interest from your friends and fellow church members. Ultimately, we are only called to be faithful in our walk before the Lord; the actual results must be entrusted to His perfect will. Your energy, enthusiasm, and maturity, however, will be infectious and go a long way to ensure success by the Lord's leading.

Now, for those that don't believe it's proper or right for "politics" to be part of the training mission of the church, I would ask that you quickly scan Chapter 12, "Endnote: Why Don't We Get Involved?" and also Chapter 3, "Our Biblical Mandate as Christians to Vote". I suggest the question we must ask ourselves is not "should we?" address our citizenship duty within the church, but rather "how should we?".

My prayer is that you will keep these thoughts in mind as you help break new ground at your church. I can assure you they will guide you faithfully, and help prevent unrealistic expectations from getting in the way. May the Lord, then, richly bless your work and use you mightily to further His kingdom.

3 *Our Biblical Mandate as Christians to Vote*

“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again?...You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden.” (Matt 5:13,14)

Voting, per se, is not directly addressed in the Bible by command or precept. A form of divinely appointed “voting” could be ascribed to the soldiers that prevented king Saul from killing his son Jonathan (1 Sam 14:24-45), or the selection of Matthias to replace Judas Iscariot (Acts 1:20-26). The use of lots, in general, provided a way to determine God’s will when important decisions or selections needed to be made. Although voting was not unknown in ancient days (e.g., the Romans), it was not until quite recent times that popular elections have become commonplace amongst nations.

Since voting rules and procedures have not been given to us by God, we must look to Biblical principles and precepts that apply. Though an exhaustive treatment is beyond the scope of this booklet, a few clear examples will hopefully suffice. In Prov 11:14 we find:

“For lack of guidance a nation falls, but many advisors make victory sure.”

Ultimately, a nation’s leader (ruler) should seek out the Lord’s will in order to ensure he makes godly decisions (Deut 17:14-20). This can be done through diligent study of scripture, sincerely seeking after the Lord through prayer, and availing oneself of wise, godly counsel from those that are trustworthy. Advisors provide not only appropriate information, but insights into what is right and wrong, what consequences may occur, and wisdom into what action to take or decision to make. With a multiplicity of dependable counselors, as Proverbs 11:14 implies, the right outcome is within reach (Prov 15:22; 20:18; 24:5,6). Without godly counsel, leadership cannot be trusted to do the right thing, and historically they will eventually go astray. The end result of poor, ungodly leadership, is a nation where the people go their own way and do what is right in their own eyes (Judges 21:25; Prov 28:28; 29:2, 4). As we know from experience, and by historical events in the Old Testament, the personal example and decisions of a leader can have a profound effect on an entire nation. As Prov 11:14

implies, a nation can cease to exist (fall) without proper guidance being given and followed. Incidentally, the source of national destruction can come from external threats (enemies) that overwhelm a weakened country, or from internal moral decay resulting in unchecked violence; rebellion; injustice; wickedness; and the like.

So, what does this have to do with voting? Our form of government has been specifically designed to ask who should rule over us. Elections are the vehicle instituted to select those men and women believed to be the best leaders to wield authority and power over virtually every aspect of our lives. In a sense, then, our form of government asks us to be wise counselors in the selection of our rulers – whether at the city, county, state or national level. This was the intention of our nation’s founding fathers. Though quoted in Chapter 1, it bears repeating: John Jay, the first Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court said,

“Providence has given to our people the choice of their ruler, and it is the duty, as well as the privilege and interest of our Christian nation to select and prefer Christians for their rulers.”

This is an awesome responsibility, and it implies an informed, ethical electorate that will make wise decisions. If a friend comes and asks for advice on a personal matter, or is wrestling with a major decision, won’t we go the extra mile to help them determine the best course of action to take? How much more, then, should we be careful about our vote and whom we try and place to “rule” over us? Isn’t it obvious that to be ruled by godly leaders is preferable to evil ones? As Prov 29:2 says:

“When the righteous thrive, the people rejoice; when the wicked rule, the people groan.”

Remember, that a vote for a particular person is a vote for all the legislation (good or bad) that person will pursue during their “reign” in power. Do we want those in elective office to violate our sensibilities with egregious legislation, or would we prefer to have ones that support the strengthening of families, the restraint of the intrusive power of government, the protection of life, and the uplifting of moral values? Do you want rulers that will commend the “good” and punish the “evil” (Rom 13:1-5) or vice versa? I believe the answer to this question is obvious also.

Does this mean that the minimal act of voting is all that comprises our

Christian citizenship responsibilities? Absolutely not! Although voting establishes who will rule over us, we exercise a continuous vote of sorts when we express our opinions concerning the decisions (or pending decisions) of our leaders. John the Baptist spoke out against the moral evils of Herod the tetrarch (John 14:3-5) in a brutally violent environment. We have much greater freedom to expose and attempt to correct that which is wrong (or evil) in our own leaders in our day. As Ephesians 5:8-14 states, we are to:

***“Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness,
but rather expose them.”***

And by what standard are we to judge actions, God’s word of course (1 Tim 1:8-11). Whenever we provide counsel to the authorities over us, we are to be careful that we are correct, well reasoned, and respectful (Rom 13:7; 1 Peter 2:17). In like manner, we ‘vote’ when we encourage our leaders for making a correct decision, or when they took a courageous stand on some moral issue of importance to us. May we be just as quick (and full of grace: Col 4:5-6) to commend godly actions as we are called to correct ones that are ungodly and destructive.

If our votes in the selection of our “rulers” are so important, isn’t it also true when we vote on various ballot measures (propositions; initiatives; local measures; etc)? These serve to define legally what is right or wrong. These decisions, whether at the city or state level, will serve to set the standard upon which many lives and actions will be judged. If we don’t support godly, righteous standards of good, won’t unrighteous standards of evil be imposed? If Christians don’t answer the call to define what is right and wrong so that godly justice will prevail, who will answer that call? If we don’t say how (our) tax money should be spent, who will say? Obviously, it will be those that don’t believe the way we do, or don’t subscribe to the same moral standard we know to be the best for man as revealed in God’s word. No, I believe voting on proposed laws is an important part of our Christian citizenship responsibility. Man’s laws are at best only a shadow of God’s perfect law for mankind. But even so, we have opportunity in this nation to define what laws will be used to define right from wrong. May we also be diligent in this duty. I believe how we handle the selection of our leaders, how we encourage them to do good and not evil, and how we vote on various ballot measures are all part of what it means to be “salt and light” in this nation (Matt 5:13-16).

Unfortunately, the salt and light illustration has been reduced to a very refined application in many Christian circles over the years. Generally, it is taught as sharing the gospel (light) and setting an example of a Christ-like life (salt). I believe, however, these have a much broader implication for our lives. The light of God's word includes His principles, commands, precepts, laws, and of course His truths (Psalm 119). Light is used Biblically to refer to God Himself (1 John 1:5), the gospel (2 Cor 4:4), salvation (1 Peter 2:9), righteousness (Rom 13:12), and many other aspects of a believers relationship to God. Light also illuminates everything while it dispels darkness. This implies showing evil for what it is, and actively restraining it. In Matt 5:14-16 we are called to be light in the sense of good works. Doesn't this also include influencing our neighbor for good – both his and ours? Isn't this the very nature of loving our neighbor as ourselves? Applying God's truths to man's condition around us, with reason and facts, gives opportunity to be a blessing to all. Working to instill righteous laws, and supporting moral legislation is just one more aspect of our duty.

Similarly, salt symbolizes spiritual health and vigor (Matt 5:13) as well as healing (2 Kings 2:20) and God's judgment (Gen 20:26). In large quantities it can sterilize and destroy fields (Deut 29:23), while in very small amounts it can actually fertilize the soil (Luke 14:35). It is widely recognized as a preservative and for seasoning, both of which provide richness to life and serves to prevent decay. When placed directly onto a wound it will disinfect infection that may be there. Is that not also part of the call of a Christian, to work to eliminate the evil around us for the common good, yet not losing sight of our need to do all things in conformity to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, through love for our neighbor? I believe the preservative and cleansing part of our call as Christians in this society has been weakened to accepting the evil around us through "peaceful co-existence" and non-involvement in the political process. This then becomes a very narrow view of our responsibilities as Christian citizens.

Ultimately, we know the king's heart is in the hand of the Lord (Prov 21:1) and He is sovereign in all things. But we also know the Lord has given to us a special duty to exercise our vote for leadership in a godly manner. The apostle Paul exercised his rights pro-actively as a citizen of Rome when it was needed (Acts 22:22-29), we must exercise our citizenship duty whenever and wherever we can for the good of all. In doing so, even the act of voting must be done in a Christ-honoring way (1 Cor 10:31; Col

3:17). I believe wisdom dictates we should be involved in voting at every opportunity and be an influence for righteousness. However, I also believe amongst Christians there's a certain amount of risk in having them vote. I'll pose a question I'd like you to consider:

***“Which is better, a Christian that votes in an ignorant way,
or one that doesn't vote at all?”***

For too long, in my experience, many Christians have voted in an ignorant way. For too long, we have allowed our lives and our thinking to be molded and directed by the ungodly influences around us instead of God's righteous standards (Rom 10:2). When ignorant Christians vote, they cancel each other out on average, so the ungodly have an even greater chance of prevailing. When a Christian refuses to exercise his duty to vote (even though asked to do so by our nation), he in effect doubles the vote of the ungodly. Either way the influence of those called to be salt and light in their influence in this nation is compromised.

I believe the only viable, the only wise, the only responsible approach for a Christian to take is to become informed on the issues of the day and to be thoroughly equipped to exercise their vote in a reasoned, Biblically based, defensible manner. To do otherwise is abdicating our role of setting an example for those around us, and withdrawing into our own world instead of engaging the culture to honor Christ and restore good to the land – both in leadership and in justice. To do less is to turn from our high calling to love our neighbor as ourselves (Matt 22:39) and to refuse to work for the peace and prosperity of the land (Jer 29:7), for our good and our neighbors good (Micah 6:8).

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4 *Voting Statistics*

“So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.” (1 Cor 10:31)

Early in my life I was told there were three types of lies: “Lies, darned lies, and statistics”. Unfortunately, over time, I’ve found this to be quite accurate. Be that as it may, a few statistics seem to be appropriate when discussing elections, and the importance of a person participating in this precious right we have.

I can’t vouch for the accuracy of the listing below, but I know it’s been quoted numerous times on Christian Coalition pamphlets as well as in other publications.

- One vote in 1868 saved Andrew Johnson from impeachment
- One half vote average per precinct in 1960 gave John F. Kennedy victory over Richard Nixon
- One vote or less per precinct decided Averell Harriman’s gubernatorial election (1954), George McGovern’s Senatorial campaign (1960), and John Warner’s Senate race (1978)¹

A little closer in history, everyone can remember the Presidential Election of 2000. Of 101,455,899 votes cast nation-wide for either George W. Bush or Al Gore, 50,456,002 went to Bush (47.87%), and 50,999,897 (48.38%) went to Gore². But the ½ of 1% edge that Al Gore had in the popular vote didn’t carry the day – the 537 more votes Bush received in Florida (0.009% margin) determined the ultimate outcome. Does every vote count? In this election, every single vote in Florida became nationally important. For Christians, we know that each decision we make counts, including every vote that we cast. For this particular history making election the importance of every Christian’s involvement and active engagement in exercising citizenship rights became even more pronounced. But this isn’t the end of the story. Let’s take a closer look at who voted and what some of the implications are for us.

¹ “Your Voice Matters” by James Dobson, October/November 2004 issue of Focus on the Family Magazine

² Federal Election Commission; “2000 Official Presidential General Election Results”; www.fed.gov/elections

It's been reported that among adults, "born again Christians" are generally more likely to be registered to vote (85%) than are non-Christians (75%). What is interesting, however, is that for the two major political parties in the United States, born again adults are equally registered as Democrats and Republicans (35% each). Another interesting fact is about 43% of born again Christian voters consider themselves to be conservatives, which was seven times higher than the number that described themselves as liberal³. It's difficult to find reliable statistics on the percentage of Christians registered to vote, and how many vote once registered. If nationwide statistical percentages give any insight, we find in the Presidential election of 2000, there were about 205,815,000 eligible voters in the United States. Of these, 76% were registered, but only 51.3% of all eligible voters actually voted. This is only a little over half of all that could potentially vote. Considering the number of elections (candidates and propositions) that are decided by an incredibly close margin, this is very disturbing in many ways.

A Harris poll conducted in September 2000 gave some insights into how people generally align themselves when it comes to politics and voting. Respondents identified themselves "a lot" as: male or female voters (44%); political party members (29%); a particular age group (26%); a member of a particular religion (24%); or as a member of a racial or ethnic group (20%). This is quite a commentary on the place religious convictions plays on a person's political leaning and voting decisions. Is it any wonder Biblical principles are not a driving factor in selecting who will rule over us, or what laws should govern the land?⁴

What do we make of the above? First, it's obvious a single vote will rarely change the course of a particular election. However, if the estimates are true that upwards of 57 million (or more) born again Christians live in the United States, this can be a powerful force for righteousness. What's particularly disturbing, however, is the lack of any particular unity in voting patterns amongst this community. Either this is a result of believing there is no substantive difference between the major political parties, or it reflects an appalling lack of well informed, Biblically based Christian decisions in the voting booth.

Though both of the above causes can be true, I believe from my own

³ Barna Research Ltd; "The Faith Factor in Election 2000: Christians Could Be a Swing Vote"; February 17, 2000; www.barna.org

⁴ Harris Poll of September 2000 as found at www.harrisinteractive.com

experience in dealing with many different churches and individual believers that the latter is the most crucial. If the foundation is weak or non-existent, how can a Christian be expected to make a decision any different than anybody else. As a matter of fact, I personally believe it may generally be better for a believer not to vote than to vote in an ignorant way. Why? Because an ignorant vote may be based upon feelings and emotion instead of deeply held convictions, reasoning, and understanding rooted on the solid foundation of Biblical truths.

The media would want you to believe Christians are an ignorant, uneducated lot, led around by the nose. We are portrayed as clueless about the major problems facing our culture and around the world, and in many cases we are actually pointed to as the reason for the problem to begin with. I would contend we are typically very knowledgeable about the way of salvation, what God requires of us as husbands and wives, mothers and fathers, and how we are to work hard and live a righteous life. Where we fail, however, is being knowledgeable about how to apply a Biblical worldview to the issues and problems society experiences around us. Remember Proverbs 11:14

“For lack of guidance a nation falls...”

I believe it's time for churches to include citizenship training in their arsenal of ministries to equip believers. But this training must be from a Biblical worldview perspective and not from a vested, narrow self interested perspective. The ballot box is just one small component of our arsenal of weapons to influence the world, but it's an important one. I believe Christians, of all people, are called to be examples of good citizens – and good citizens vote knowledgeably. Only then, in my mind, will each vote truly count.

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5 *Church Do's & Don'ts*

“Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is the light that makes everything visible.” (Eph 5:11-14)

In the last generation, there have been at least two major developments external to the church that have helped stifle much of its proper role in equipping believers to be godly Christian citizens - the “separation of church and state” controversy and tax exempt status.

The separation belief has had a significant dampening effect on our perceived role as believers in a very hostile environment. Though it sounds like a wise and insightful phrase, in reality it is a claim by non-Christians that few believers are able to effectively counter or correct. In fact, there’s a growing contingent of Christians who have bought into this principle and are convinced churches shouldn’t have anything to do with political issues, government, or anything socially or culturally controversial. The fact of the matter, however, is the United States Constitution specifically restricts government from establishing a national religion, or restricting its free exercise. This is clear by reading the First Amendment to the Constitution (known as the Establishment Clause):

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...”

On the other hand, religion is free to influence government for good and ensure it fulfills its God ordained role (Rom 13:1-6). To remove any vestige of religion from the public domain is not only impossible, but in reality formally institutes a secular (or atheistic) belief system in its place – this by itself would be establishing a religion and would therefore be unconstitutional. Fortunately, numerous books have been written recently documenting the original intent of this Amendment and also the fallacy of the arguments involved⁵. The reader is encouraged to find and read these to better understand the issues and implications involved.

⁵ Original Intent – The Courts, the Constitution, & Religion by David Barton, 1997; The Myth of Separation by David Barton; see also publications produced by Wallbuilders, at www.wallbuilders.com.

The second development is the 501(c)3 status of the vast majority of churches in this nation. If a church is incorporated as a 501(c)3 non-profit, religious organization, they may engage in activities to influence legislation only if the total sum of these activities is not a “substantial” part of their overall activity for the year (generally considered 5% or less of the church’s annual budget). Because the amount of involvement allowed by a church is not quantified, there is uncertainty as to what can be done and not incur IRS involvement. This situation provides a convenient excuse for some church leaders to sidestep the entire issue of equipping believers to be salt and light in the political process. Though individuals are still free to be active on their own, pastors many times will find it easier, and safer, to completely ignore any Biblical mandate to address who should govern us and what constitutes just laws. Though this sounds like noble high ground, the practical implications are “issues” or “subjects” become off limits for teachers and preachers, independent of their conscience and what the Bible teaches. This by its nature can deny the Bible is sufficient for every good work and all matters of faith and practice (2 Tim 3:16-17).

Where did this limitation on churches come from? Believe it or not, it’s a relatively recent development in our nation’s history. The current law prohibiting churches (specifically, non-profit religious organizations that are tax-exempt) from speaking out formally and directly on candidates and laws not directly affecting them is a descendent of a July 2, 1954 law. At that time, Senator Lyndon B. Johnson was facing re-election. He wanted to ensure “political activity” by tax-exempt organizations was prohibited to help ensure his re-election to Congress. He introduced an amendment on the Senate floor, which was then approved without hearings or debate. The result became the first time in our nation’s history that pulpits were effectively silenced on political speech⁶.

Right or wrong, the legal environment surrounding the 501(c)3 church’s freedoms in the area of political involvement is murky at best. There are obvious inconsistencies in legal interpretation in different parts of the country, but a definite swing has occurred towards a benign approach to addressing political issues to ensure no actual or perceived legal limit is violated. I believe these decisions of convenience have become dramatic errors of omission (no involvement) in the guise of preventing any possible error of commission.

⁶ “Dr. Kennedy Tells Congress to Restore Clergy Free Speech”, Impact article, Coral Ridge Ministries, July 2002

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Given the above situation, the following is a short compendium of what a church (the formal entity itself) can and cannot do legally in the current environment. However, if there are any doubts about these activities, it's recommended professional legal advice be sought since interpretations of allowed activities and what "substantial" means can differ from region to region.

What a Church Generally Can Do:

- Conduct non-partisan voter registration drives
- Preach about citizenship responsibilities (e.g., responsibility to vote)
- Discuss church doctrine pertaining to candidate views (such as abortion)
- Distribute non-partisan voter education materials that address a wide array of issues the candidates will face (e.g., voter guides, scorecards)
- Host candidate/issues forums as long as all candidates are invited to participate
- Allow all candidates to speak at church services (pray, testimonies, preach) as long as all are given the opportunity and no campaign activities are conducted
- Educate members about pending legislation
- Distribute political statements and opinions on political issues in the church parking lot, so long as there is no church endorsement
- Support or oppose judicial, department or cabinet appointments (not candidates, however)
- Publish a church bulletin ad for all who request it, as long as it is purchased at the regular rate for such ads, and equally offered to all candidates
- Publish neutral news stories and public endorsements of candidates in an objective news reporting context

What a Church Generally Cannot Do:

- Endorse a political candidate, or allow candidates to solicit funds in church
- Solicit for, or contribute to, political candidates or political action committees
- Participate in fund-raising projects for political action committees representing interests of the church
- Make a donation of a mailing list or office equipment to a political candidate
- Sell a political ad at a discount rate to selected advertisers only
- Pay to attend a caucus for a state or national political convention
- Pay fees for political events from church funds
- Allow the distribution of political materials clearly favoring one candidate or political party and implying endorsement of the church

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It should be noted, however, that a pastor retains his personal right to endorse candidates and participate in political committees independent of the church (that is, not representing or speaking for the church).

The key to approaching elections and the issues addressed by voting is for a church to present information, facts, scripture, and sound reasoning in a non-exclusive manner. By this I mean that church leadership shouldn't tell a person who to vote for, but may present information as well as Biblical insights addressing all viable candidates so the believer is equipped to make their own decisions. The same is generally true for ballot measures, though greater freedom is allowed.

The above list of do's and don'ts was summarized from various references⁷. The reader is encouraged to access these resources directly to become better informed.

⁷ Christian Coalition of America (www.cc.org); Center for Reclaiming America – Citizenship & Your Church; Focus on the Family – CitizenLink (www.family.org); American Center for Law and Justice (www.aclj.org); “The Eagle and the Cross” from the Rutherford Institute (www.eaglecross.net/Ruther.html); Liberty Counsel, “Political and Legislative Guidelines for Churches and Pastors”

6 *Principle vs. Practical*

“There is no wisdom, no insight, no plan that can succeed against the Lord.” (Prov 21:30)

There is a quandary in politics that can make many decisions on potential legislation a virtual minefield for the godly leader. As a case in point, consider a hypothetical situation where a Christian Pro-Life legislator is faced with deciding on a law that would make abortions illegal except for reasons of rape, incest (or even health of the mother). On the one hand, if he supports the law he shows progress in removing the scourge of the vast majority of abortions as practiced in this nation. However, to some, he may appear to have abandoned his fundamental principle of valuing all life as being in the image of God because the law would still allow abortion under certain conditions. If he doesn't support the law, he may be viewed as acting consistent with the fundamental principle of all life being of equal value (no baby left behind!), but a practical outcome would be allowing all abortions to continue unabated.

This quandary is not as far fetched as you may think. The same questions occur when considering third party candidates for office. Should a vote be cast for a candidate (third party) that has virtually no opportunity to be elected but has positions more in line with our beliefs, or for the best of the two major party candidates? This soul-searching problem is dramatically illustrated in looking at California registration statistics. For the presidential election year of 2000, of almost 16 million registered voters, over 45% were registered Democrats, and almost 35% were registered Republican. A full 15% of those registered declined to state their preference, while about 5% registered as one of the five other officially recognized political parties in the State (American Independent; Green; Libertarian; Reform; and Natural Law). Hypothetically, in order for Republicans to win a race, they must garner a 10% increase in votes over their registered base. If half the undeclared voters vote Republican (not an unreasonable assumption), they still fall about 3% short on average. With the 5% minority party vote remaining committed to their party, the Democratic Party will continue to dominate indefinitely. This occurred at the national level with the Presidential election of 1992, where “conservative” voters chose the Reform Party ticket in sufficient numbers to ensure a Republican President was not elected and Bill Clinton was elected

without a majority. Incidentally, Bill Clinton was elected both times without a majority of the national vote.

Christians have been split many times over these types of issues because of a difference in approaches to politics. Though we have a common enemy, sincere believers can (and will) disagree on tactics to use as a matter of conscience. This difference is sometimes referred to as “Principle verses Practical”⁸, although in fairness, it should be pointed out that each side of the illustrations above can be grounded in solid principles. Also, sincere believers can (and will) differ on what tactics should be used to defeat a common enemy.

One other point needs to be mentioned when it comes to candidates for public office. It’s believed by many that supporting someone implies acceptance of all the candidate believes or does, while the opposition, de facto, can do nothing right. In reality, every candidate, no matter how good, is going to be a compromise from our own personal views or positions. It’s appropriate to remember that you can personally endorse a particular candidate without compromising your own beliefs. In other words, recommending a person for public office doesn’t necessarily mean you enthusiastically approve everything about them. When this is understood and applied, some of the practicalities of who to support become much clearer. More will be discussed on this topic in Chapter 7, “Biblical Qualifications for Candidates.”

The following is a short summary of major concerns and positive aspects of the “Principle” and “Practical” approaches to tough problems. Though this may not provide a definitive way to reach consensus on issues, it’s intended to at least make a voter aware of the shortcomings of different tactical approaches so believers can better understand, and hence appreciate, each other. We’re called by God to defer to each other whenever we can, to strive to understand each other as best we can, and to not think less of each other when we disagree on things that scripture gives us freedom to differ on. As you wrestle through voting issues from a Christian, Biblical worldview perspective, may you first strive to determine what would bring the most glory to Christ, and then how to best accomplish that given existing limitations.

⁸ The “Principle” position may also be referred to as ideal, conscience oriented and absolutist. The “Practical” position may also be referred to as practice, pragmatic, contextual, realist oriented and incrementalist

Contrasting Two Different Decision Strategies

If “Principle” Strategy

Concerns: Can appear as legalistic in application
Can focus on truth, with no allowance for benefits
Can result in no action at all
Can develop a “leave it up to God” mentality
Can appear as the easy way out
Can appear as a “feel good” vote
Can prevent any compromise from occurring
Can appear intolerant of other approaches
Can view other approaches as “ungodly” or “sinful”
Can appear to waste a vote
Can create even worse results
Can prevent “much good” because of a “little bad”
Can appear to be living in a “holy huddle”
Can overlook areas of freedom to compromise

Positives: Can help define issues and principles clearly
Can send a powerful message that cannot be ignored
Can prevent expediency overwhelming what is right
Can ultimately result in the right answer being implemented
Can help to determine the core Values that are not negotiable

If “Practical” Strategy

Can appear as an “ends justifies the means” mentality
Can appear to compromise beliefs for results
Can be driven into expediency
Can appear to trust man more than God
Can appear as “politics as usual”
Can appear as siding with enemy
Can result in gradual movement away from righteousness
Can appear to be unprincipled in approach
Can appear to support the lesser of two evils
Can appear to waste a vote
Can create even worse results
Can cause “much bad” for a “little good”
Can appear to be in league with non-Christians
Can overlook key foundational principles

Can make progress without necessarily violating principle
Can accomplish “much good” while tolerating “some bad”
Can accomplish incremental changes vice none at all
Can ultimately result in the right answer being implemented
Can help to creatively determine options consistent with core principles

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7 *Biblical Qualifications for Candidates*

“The king’s heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases.” (Prov 21:1)

If you relied upon radio advertisements and mass mailings describing candidates for office you’d walk away with a very distorted view of anyone’s qualifications. The environment in which politics is played in the United States can be vicious and extremely destructive. It is the rare candidate that attempts to stay above the fray and only deal with issues and their own qualifications. But what are we to do when there is such limited insight available into a person’s true character, and their opposition distorts truth so much?

For a Christian, reliance is often made on very unreliable information. Worse yet is the situation where one has not made up his mind until the night before the election and begins to go through the mountain of information they’ve received in the mail and attempt to make an “informed” decision. Not only that, but how many of us will admit to relying upon our spouse to call the shots, and then just copy their decisions?

The selection of those that will “rule” over us is a profound responsibility that should never be taken lightly. All who attain office are placed there for our good by God (Rom 13:1-5), and if we vote, we are an active party to who will occupy that office and the decisions they’ll eventually make – whether good or bad. Just as its important to chose a competent auto mechanic, or brain surgeon, it’s important to know as much about each candidate as possible even though at times it can be extremely difficult.

So what should we try to find out? The following list is a good starting point on what we should know before we are willing to endorse them for an important leadership position. I list these qualifications for two reasons. First, it helps demonstrate how little we typically know about those we usually vote for. Secondly, these should be the questions we have in mind when we’re doing our homework on an individual’s qualifications. The list is ordered to address a candidate from literally the inside out. The spiritual condition is the most critical, then the principles that provide the bedrock for their decisions, the quality of their character as they act upon their principles, then their actual track record. Though the following is not

a complete listing, it does provide a starting point.

Qualifications Relating to a Candidate's Spiritual Condition:

- Are they a sincere, committed believer? (2 Cor 13:5)
- Do they have a clear, personal testimony relating to Jesus Christ? (Rom 10:9-13)
- Are they a faithful member in good standing of a Christ-honoring Church? (Heb 10:25)
- Are they accountable to the leadership within their church? (Heb 13:17)
- Do they routinely seek counsel from mature, godly men? (Prov 11:14)

Qualifications Relating to a Candidate's Basic Decision Principles:

- Do they understand the Biblical roles of the family (Col 3:18-21), the church (Matt 5:13-16), and government? (Rom 13:1-7)
- Do they understand the need for strengthening of families as much as possible? (1 Tim 5:8)
- Do they understand the need for rightly defined and applied justice (Psalm 82:3; Prov 21:3)
- Do they uphold and defend the sanctity of life from conception to its natural end? (Ex 20:13)
- Do they strongly encourage and support morality in all spheres of public and private life? (Eph 5:3-7)

Qualifications Relating to a Candidate's Character:

- Would they meet the Biblical qualifications for Elder or Deacon? (1 Tim 3:1-13; Titus 1:6-9; 1 Peter 5:1-3)
- Have they demonstrated personal responsibility and remorse (repentance) for any prior sinful actions, and understand why they were wrong? (Prov 12:1; 1 Cor 6:9-11)
- Do they appear to be double-minded? (James 4:7-8)
- Do they appear to be ambitious for power, or for serving? (James 3:13-18)
- Do others you respect openly support this person? (Prov 27:2)

Qualifications Relating to a Candidate's Knowledge of the Position:

- Do they have related experience in a similar type of position? (Prov 22:29)
- Do they understand the issues and decisions they will face? (Luke 14:25-32)
- Is their previous voting record (if any) morally sound? In not, is there a good understanding as to why? (1 Tim 3:10)
- Do they have the necessary ability to work with different types of people? (2 Tim 2:24-25; Col 4:5-6)

Remember, each individual voter doesn't have to independently do all the research on each candidate. Once collected, it can be organized and

shared with a number of others in a variety of ways. Remember also that candidates are asking to represent YOU, therefore they should be willing to provide information to allow you to make an informed decision concerning their competency to govern. Some thoughts on how and where to gather information follow.

Contact the Candidate Directly

- Locate the candidates office and ask for an opportunity to meet personally with the candidate
- If the position is a local office, it may be possible to visit the candidate in their home. This provides an excellent opportunity to learn about them and their views as well as their family life and environment
- Invite the candidate to a small group for questions and answers in a casual setting
- Find out where the candidate has speaking engagements and attend. Hear their positions on issues directly. Ask questions dear to you if the opportunity presents itself. Often they will stay around to answer questions one on one afterwards

Contact the Candidates Information Outlets

- Call the candidates office and ask specific questions and for information to be sent to you
- Keep all mailings you receive that are pertinent
- Access and read the candidates web site (if they have one)
- Get all press releases and position papers that are available

Contact Outside Groups

- Track down local newspaper articles about the candidate
- Find voter guides that any of a number of organizations produce. A word of caution, however, be careful of the motivation behind the guides
- Contact local watch dog groups for information on “hot” issues
- Find out what individuals and/or organizations endorse the candidate
- Call local radio stations (Christian also) to find out what they know about the candidate
- Assess carefully what opposing candidates are saying
- If the candidate has a prior public voting record, find out what it was

Contact any Acquaintances That May Know the Candidate

- Talk to those you know that may have personal knowledge of the candidate to get a clearer, more personal picture of them
- Talk to the candidate’s neighbors to ensure they have a good reputation in the community they live in
- If you can determine what church they are a member of, make contact to find out

if they are in good standing. Talk to the pastor to find out more specifically

Contact the Candidate's Campaign Manager and Volunteer

- Volunteer to walk precincts for the candidate so you have an opportunity to meet them and find out first hand what they are like and how they are running their campaign
- Talk to those that know the candidate well to get a fuller view of them
- Watch how the campaign is organized and run to see if it is a high integrity, honest campaign

An excellent way to develop an even greater understanding of a candidate's qualifications is to use church small groups to compare notes on all collected information. These can be home Bible study groups, discussion groups and Sunday School classes used to wrestle with issues. By sharing available information with a larger audience not only are more equipped to vote correctly, but a better appreciation for what is important to you as well as others is developed.

A thorny question we've all faced is whether we can with a clear conscience vote for a person that is not a Christian. There are obviously several different conditions that can exist: a Christian running against a non-Christian; two Christians running against each other; two (or more) non-Christians running for the same office. There can be concern about a professing Christian's true condition of faith when actions do not match what would be expected from a Biblical perspective. In addition, it can happen that a Christian may not have some of the requisite qualifications (knowledge, experience, background). Just because a candidate is a Christian doesn't necessarily make that person the best (most qualified) one to hold the office. As in other fields and professions, the person's moral fiber may not be the determining factor, however, I must be quick to add that a position of public leadership demands that a higher standard be used to judge who will rule over us. In addition, any particular position may become a springboard to higher public office with even greater influence and impact upon the public.

Most, if not all, legislation has a moral component to it. A public servant's basic life principles, and whether they believe they are accountable to the Almighty Judge of the universe, should carry great sway in whether they can be supported for the job or not. Another moral component is the person's life as a leader in the public eye. A holder of public office can influence their constituents for good or evil by the

example of their personal life. Contrary to major media claims to the contrary, character does count, and it counts a lot. The following quote from Noah Webster (1758-1843) combines these two thoughts, our responsibility and the qualifications for office:

“It is alleged by men of loose principles...that religion and morality are not necessary or important qualifications for political stations. But the Scriptures teach a different doctrine. They direct that rulers should be men who rule in the fear of God...” “When you become entitled to exercise the right of voting for public officers, let it be impressed on your mind that God commands you to choose for rulers just men who will rule in the fear of God. The preservation of a republican government depends on the faithful discharge of this duty; if the citizens neglect their duty and place unprincipled men in office, the government will soon be corrupted...”

Judge for yourself, does history demonstrate the truth of the above quote? I believe any honest assessment would show that it is true. The problem in the typical election comes when the quality of the candidates' personal lives are either unknown or at best inaccurately portrayed by the opposition.

The phrase we've all heard in describing the typical election is to select the “lesser of two evils.” This is not only a sad commentary on the quality of men and women seeking public office, but also on our level of frustration in making a selection. In practical terms, a multi-faceted approach is needed to overcome this situation. When close to an election we must exercise our vote in as responsible a manner as possible. By recognizing that voting for a particular person does not automatically mean we endorse everything about them, we become freer to choose those closer to the type of person we desire to rule over us. This requires a person to wrestle through the “principle” verses “practice” concerns addressed in Chapter 6, particularly when third party choices exist. Whatever the eventual outcome, we're still duty bound to make a choice that will result in the least damage. Afterwards, our recourse is to influence (and encourage) our representative to make godly decisions as often and as convincingly as we can.

A longer term perspective is to raise up sincere Christian candidates for all levels of public service. This requires mentoring those that are gifted to lead and have the heart to serve in a hostile environment. I believe pastors (and fathers) are in a particularly critical position to influence godly

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young men and women to seek elected positions. If this sphere of endeavor is viewed as “unworthy” or “intrinsically evil”, then it’s no surprise the righteous won’t pursue it. But, what better way to influence society for good and to bring glory to Christ in the public domain than having godly lives, making godly decisions, visibly exemplifying their Christian walk to all? This has happened in the past, and it can still happen in our nation today.

8 *Election Pre-View Evenings*

“Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed.” (Prov 16:3)

One of the rights we have, Christian or not, is to freely exercise our citizenship responsibilities. I believe it’s incumbent upon church leaders to encourage active involvement in the governance of this nation, and all decisions affecting us. This includes the election of leaders and the definition of the standard to be applied to all people’s actions. To do this in a knowledgeable and thoughtful manner it’s important to create opportunities for proper equipping to occur.

One approach is to host what I term *Election Pre-View Evenings*. These evenings can use a wide range of approaches and formats, but the objective is the same: to help equip believers to fulfill their high calling as citizens in two kingdoms, our heavenly one (Matt 22:37) and our earthly one (Matt 22:39). In this earthly kingdom we apply ourselves for the good of others and our own families. Being a member of our heavenly kingdom, however, reminds us of who we are and our responsibility to fulfill our salt and light mission while here. Like anything, this needs to be done in a Christ-honoring, orderly way. The following summarizes very simple, practical aspects of conducting an *Election Pre-View Evening* to ensure a meaningful and productive use of resources and time. Once tried, you’ll undoubtedly tailor your own approach to better suit your specific church’s needs.

Start Up

Good, early organization is important to ensure the success of any endeavor. By bringing together a small group of interested people early on, most difficulties can be anticipated and addressed before they become overwhelming. This also gives an early opportunity for church leadership to become aware of plans, and provide adequate shepherding oversight to all activities. One caution for leaders, a church can be similar to a secular business in that lack of attention or interest by senior managers (e.g., pastors or elder board) will give the unmistakable impression an activity is not important. Not only will this destroy enthusiasm, it will also lead to an inability to answer questions of why this ministry area is important.

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A major decision requiring an early answer is whether the approach will include the direct involvement of other churches, or whether your church will proceed alone. The dynamics involved with multiple churches is significantly different than if wholly contained within one group. Some of the complications include:

- Possible discord due to doctrinal differences that may tend to divide
- Differences in understanding of the Biblical view on some issues
- Potentially strong leadership's inability to defer to others
- Larger churches exercising a greater degree of influence
- The more churches, generally the more divergent the perspectives
- The larger the group, generally the more difficulty in obtaining consensus

One advantage of involvement by multiple churches is the balance that can result, as Proverbs 15:22 says: "Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed." The airing of different approaches and perspectives causes each to consider what is best for all and not just one's own particular focus. Since there are many reasons churches sometimes can't work well together, it's vital that solid objectives be created early on to provide focus on what needs to be accomplished. With this focus, the Lord can work through the variety of issues to show strength in the Body of Christ, instead of the typical standoffishness. When decisions need to be made, it's helpful to consider the following Biblical guidelines:

- Earnestly strive to seek God's will and counsel (Psalm 143:10)
- Ensure scriptural admonitions are not violated (2 Tim 3:16,17)
- Show mutual regard for one another (Phil 2:2-4)
- Submit one to another (Eph 5:21)
- Wait patiently upon one another (Eph 4:20)
- Genuinely consider one another's perspectives (Prov 15:22, Phil 2:4)
- Prefer and defer to one another on all minor issues (Prov 13:10)
- Always maintain a teachable spirit (Prov 18:15)

Another advantage of multiple church involvement is the obvious multiplying effect. The more churches involved in the process, the greater the interest generated to get involved and the greater the number consistently equipped. Resources can also be leveraged in an efficient manner, and the availability of a larger church facility to host any ***Election Pre-View Evening*** provides opportunity for much larger attendance.

One other option, a single church may choose to conduct all the planning for an ***Election Pre-View Evening*** and then invite other churches

to attend. Although this puts a significant burden on one church, it allows others to benefit from their diligent efforts. It should be noted, however, that unless there is a strong relationship with other churches, through their leaders knowing and working with each other in the past or some other common binding factor, the probability of having significant attendance from outside your own church will be quite small.

Common Goals

It is critical early on to establish (document) what is going to be accomplished. This is even more important when several churches are involved in the decisions to follow. Having a set of goals prevents new participants from having unrealistic expectations, and keeps the group focused on what needs to be done. Example goals could include:

- The desire to educate Christians to better cast their ballot
- To equip believers to be more actively engaged in citizenship rights and privileges (James 2:14-17) at all levels
- To develop a common understanding of the issues being addressed
- To support the election or appointment of the godly to public office through prayer, encouragement and active involvement
- To purpose to pray individually and corporately for all that are in authority over us (1 Tim 2:2)
- To encourage Christians with information on victories the Lord has provided (1 Thess 5:11; Heb 3:13)
- To identify existing, and/or publish, resource materials for wider use
- To support the creation and enforcement of righteous laws (1 Tim 1:8-11)

Whatever the specific direction you choose, taking time to characterize what you want to accomplish will be well worth the investment.

In all that's agreed to be accomplished, maintaining the integrity and reputation of the Christian community, and of Jesus Christ specifically, must be the overarching vision. Obeying the civil law concerning activities by churches, particularly those that are 501(c)3, will help prevent needless legal entanglements. Finally, purposing to ensure the various church representatives keep their respective church leadership informed of all developments, and actively seeking their wise counsel and support will prevent internal misunderstandings or confusion as time goes on.

Conduct of the Evening

The concept of an *Election Pre-View Evening* is foreign to most churches primarily because they've never been exposed to one, much less actually conducted one. Like any formal meeting, there needs to be structure and ground-rules that are understood up front. This brief section is intended to provide some suggestions on how to go about a potentially "charged" evening in a manner that is conducted in an orderly fashion – befitting a family of God.

There can be any number of segments to plan for, although each must be tailored to meet your own specific needs. Just as a long worship service can begin to lose people, a long evening after a long day of activities can also cause people to disengage. Two hours is a reasonable time period to allocate, with time assigned according to the emphasis that is going to be stressed. Another stumbling block for many is children. For those children old enough to understand, an evening like this can become a superb opportunity to inculcate citizenship duties and responsibilities (with a Christian worldview) early on. For younger children, the availability of child care will allow both mother and father to attend so they both can be equipped and not have to rely upon the other as their sole source of information.

The following is a generic outline some churches have followed and found useful:

- Welcome, Objectives and Ground-Rules
- Biblical Instruction
- Ballot Measures
- Candidates
- Prayer and Close
- Fellowship and Follow-Up Time

The ground-rules will set the stage for all that follows. It's important to ensure the audience knows the host church is not formally endorsing a candidate or "commanding" a person to vote a certain way. The material presented will be the opinions of the presenters only. The objectives of the evening should be clearly stated up front and adhered to, to prevent rabbit trails or misplaced expectations. This will also help guarantee the evening will end on time. Some important ground-rules recommended for use include:

- The facilitator reserves the right to move the discussion forward

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- The Biblical mandate to justify the evening will be explained, but it is not intended to be discussed – that can occur afterwards
- When the audience is invited to participate, comments are to be brief, to the point, and as factual as possible
- Providing the Biblical foundation for anything presented is encouraged throughout
- Everyone is to be gracious and patient with one another, and respect each others views (does not mean everyone must agree with each view!)
- Extended conversations should be reserved for after the close of the formal meeting
- The formal part of the evening will end on time

The degree and type of Biblical instruction provided will be determined by the Biblical maturity of the audience. If the concept of Christian Citizenship is completely alien to those that attend, then some degree of instruction is absolutely critical to show there is Biblical warrant for what is going to be provided and discussed. Potential subjects include any of the material contained in this pamphlet, tailored or expanded for the expected audience.

For ballot measures, the section following this one provides one possible approach to standardize the presentations. There's great potential for any issue to result in a long presentation or discussion. To minimize this possibility up front, it is recommended there be a "dry-run" of all presentations prior to the formal evening. This allows each speaker (if more than one) to calibrate their approach and content with others. It also allows opportunity for changes to be made to shorten (or lengthen) the actual wording to fit the available time. Even with this preparation, there can be lively discussion if a question and answer period is allowed after each ballot measure is talked about. This is where the facilitator needs to judge when to stop discussion and move on.

Presentations addressing candidates are more difficult, since the issues or knowledge of them may be less certain. Some guidelines in addressing this area are also presented below. Even more so than ballot measures, candidate discussions of any kind may bring out strong emotions on one side or the other. In addition, this particular area is one that holds the greatest risk for a church to get into difficulties because of the potential to be viewed as endorsing a particular person

Some final instruction at the close of the evening would include recommending further study by the participants in small Bible fellowship groups, as a family, or with friends. This makes the exercise even more

personal and begins to pattern an approach to taking the subject of voting to the level of importance it is due.

Following the formal portion of the evening, an informal time of fellowship and discussion can allow more detailed questions to be addressed that would not be appropriate in the larger session.

Ballot Measures

Very few legislative decisions are voted on directly by the public. Those that are on a ballot can be due to petition drives by registered voters, bond measures that by law are required to be voted on, or other means specific to a particular state, county or city. However they become qualified for placement on a ballot, they represent opportunities for the “people” to be heard directly.

Ballot measures represent one of the clearer opportunities to apply Biblical principles when voting decisions are made. Many times they appear because an issue is so controversial a legislative body won't take the risk of addressing it directly. An example of a formative issue the public was asked to decide on was California's recent Proposition 22 fight. This “save marriage” proposition in March 2000 attempted to prevent the legalization or recognition of gay marriages in the state. It stated: “Only marriage between a man and a woman is valid or recognized in California”. By passing overwhelmingly with 61.4% of the vote it demonstrated the power of the evangelical community when it mobilizes on a moral issue that affects everyone. The “rest of the story” however, is that even with a victory of this type constant vigilance is required to maintain this moral standard in the public domain. Since the passage of Prop 22, there have been a slew of legislative measures at both the local and state level to legalize “domestic partnerships”. These attempt to legitimize homosexual relationships in all aspects except the use of the term marriage. One vote on one issue, though successful, is not cause for Christians to think the battle is won. The fight will continue on many fronts, and we must learn to take a stand for righteousness wherever possible.

Be that as it may, for those ballot measures presented to the public for a vote, an ***Election Pre-View Evening*** affords an excellent opportunity to address them through Biblical glasses. Experience has shown a common format of presentation is very powerful in ensuring adequate research is done, and the audience gains a clear understanding of the issues involved.

Handouts to allow further consideration are also very important. Providing these for each presentation allows participants to further discuss at home or in small Bible Fellowship groups afterwards. An example of a single page format addressing a ballot measure is shown at the end of this section. Obviously, this can be tailored as appropriate for your application.

A word to the wise, the work required to address ballot measures will be challenging, since it's important to be as objective as possible. If done right, a balanced presentation will help ensure the integrity of the information provided as well as give confidence in those listening that it's a valid, Biblically-based answer. Some additional suggestions when researching ballot measures include the following:

- ***Each presenter:***
 - Should become personally very familiar with the Ballot Measure
 - Should read the actual text of the measure (the “legalese”) and not just the summarized version that typically appears in voter guides
 - Needs to be as objective as possible in addressing the issue, even though they may feel very strongly one way or the other. This means willing to adequately represent the best arguments from the opposite side of your own position
 - Should be concise, to the point, and not exceed any time allocation
 - Needs to submit to the moderator to ensure flow through the evening

- ***Arguments For & Against***
 - The strongest arguments on each side should be represented, not just those acceptable to the presenter
 - Use factual information and good logic, not emotional rhetoric
 - Be brief, not wordy

- ***Biblical Principles***
 - Use as many scriptural references as needed to convey the needed point/principle
 - It is not necessary to provide the scriptural text in writing since they can be looked up at home
 - Use clear principles and scripture verses that are un-ambiguous and do not require great explanation
 - Bring out as many pertinent principles as possible that directly address the issue

- ***Significant Organizational Endorsements***
 - Preferably, use only easily recognizable organizations (or persons)
 - The particular reason for the organization’s position need not be listed unless it is absolutely necessary and can be brief

- ***Personal Recommendation***
 - There is liberty for the presenter to recommend a “Yes” or “No” on the ballot measure based upon their own research. This does not constitute an official position by the host church, church policy, or church direction towards its members
 - Summarize the primary, compelling reason(s) for your stance
 - Stay away from saying “you should”, etc. This is the presenter’s position based upon personal investigation and study

- ***Q&A***
 - If possible, time should be allowed for the audience to give different views or have questions and answers. This provides participation by the audience and makes them more than just “hearers of the word”. Comments should, however, be supported as factually as possible.
 - The presenter is the best informed to address issues that may come up since he has done the research others have not had opportunity to do
 - There is always the potential that additional, compelling information and insights can be provided through the audience (Prov 15:22)
 - A strict time limit should be applied to ensure the evening progresses

Even though this appears to be a complicated process, remember it serves a couple of objectives. First, it helps to equip Christians to be educated voters by showing how to reason through a decision from a Biblical perspective. Second, it demonstrates to church members this is something important and should not be taken lightly. Third, it provides an impetus for others to get involved, realizing this is a high and noble calling in our country – to directly influence the creation of the standard with which we will all be held accountable. Finally, and most importantly, it demonstrates that the Bible, God’s direct revelation to us, is relevant, timely, and provides the necessary principles to govern even our votes.

Ballot Measure “A” (Example Format)

Official Title: *(The title that will appear on the ballot)*

Summary: *(Short paragraph summarizing measure (official or your own))*

Significant Arguments For: *(List all major, strong arguments for)*

-
-
-

Significant Arguments Against: *(List all major, strong arguments against)*

-
-
-

Biblical Principles that Apply: *(List key references, and principle involved)*

-
-
-

Significant Organizations Stance: *(List reputable org’s for & against)*

- Those For:
- Those Against:

Personal Recommendation: *(Give own personal position and major reason)*

Discussion (Q&A): *(Personal notes by audience can be written below)*

Candidates for Office

Presentations concerning candidates are intrinsically more difficult, because knowledge of them is generally less certain. If a similar level and type of information is available on all viable candidates for a particular office, it can be presented (or overviewed) quite easily in a factual manner. Care should be exercised, however, to not appear that the church is formally endorsing a particular person. This part of the evening will benefit tremendously by having voter guides available for handout that are proven to be trustworthy. Several different sources would be even more beneficial. The availability of guides has been tested in courts recently, and as long as certain requirements are followed, their use is fully legal.

Another effective way to handle candidates, if time allows, is to convene a panel to discuss various known positions of candidates. Again, it's important to accurately reflect the stance of all viable candidates to ensure objectivity in presentation and at the same time to prevent the appearance of an official endorsement one way or another by a church. This type of approach requires a significant investment in research time to understand the candidate as much as possible. An alternative is to review available voter guides with the audience to better calibrate on a candidate's position on important issues. Though this can be very helpful, there are limitations.

In addition to voter guides, soliciting comments from the audience that are factually based and not just emotional responses can be of benefit to all present. Personally verified information (or from a known, credible source) can be very powerful in settings like this. Discretion, however, is extremely important so that rumors and innuendo don't color an otherwise God honoring discussion. Obviously, Christians are not to have a part in any form of gossip.

For more detailed discussions on candidate issues, see Chapter 9 "Voter Guides" and Chapter 7 "Biblical Qualifications for Candidates".

Guest Speakers (Politicians)

An unusual way to gain direct insights into candidates for public office is to extend invitations to attend the ***Election Pre-View Evening***. If one candidate is invited, all viable candidates must be invited to ensure objectivity. This doesn't mean all must agree to actually attend, but each must have been given the opportunity. When I say viable, I'm referring to

those that are generally considered able to receive at least a few percentage points of votes. There are some states and local elections that allow virtually anyone to register as a new political party or as a non-partisan candidate with virtually no qualifications. Inviting each and every one of these would be cumbersome at best.

Candidates for local public office would obviously have the highest possibility of attending. When sending a letter of invitation detail the approach to the evening, the time allocation, and the topics the candidate is asked to address so there is no confusion over expectations. A particularly insightful request would be for the candidate to give their personal Christian testimony, as well as specific prayer requests concerning those areas of public service they wrestle with.

A note of caution is appropriate. Once a person is given the floor to speak, it may become difficult to bring them to closure if they decide to talk about other subjects or ignore the time allocation given to them. How to handle this should be thought through beforehand (and even expected). An entirely different approach to dealing with candidates would be to conduct a “Candidate Night”, where the entire evening is dedicated to allowing each to talk about issues of importance to the audience and answering questions. This type of forum can be very powerful in helping individuals formulate more accurate views of the qualifications and reasoning abilities of candidates.

Invited Organizations

Two of the primary objectives of an *Election Pre-View Evening* are to educate believers on Christian citizenship duties and to equip them to engage as their particular abilities allow. A related objective is to make Christians aware of the numerous organizations diligently working to protect and promote Christian values in society and with the government. An *Election Pre-View Evening* provides a great opportunity for these groups to have information tables (or booths) available to advertise themselves and their information. The same approach is often followed during conferences, where information tables are available before, during and after the formal meeting. Those that attend have an opportunity to dialogue with men and women on the front lines of engaging the culture or the government on our behalf. A variety of books, pamphlets, publications, videos, periodicals, signup sheets etc. can be provided whether there is a representative actually present or not.

Many times Christians become disheartened because they think they're alone in trying to make a difference. By showing a sampling of the many committed efforts Christian-based organizations are making, most people become very encouraged. Also, when availing themselves of information and being added to e-mail distribution lists, the continuing process of education and activism is strengthened.

Another troublesome condition many find themselves in, is believing “we are not winning” in the war against evil in the land. By being exposed to success stories of ministries making a difference, the belief that one person can make a difference is strengthened even more. Far too many times we tend to concentrate on the massive problems all around us and don't spend sufficient time acknowledging the victories that the Lord gives through the faithful labor of His people.

One final note. Any group invited to participate should be well known to the host church and the organizers. Fringe activities and organizations that come and go can cause more problems than they are worth. Maturity of ministry is extremely important to insure an equipping ground and not an emotional roller coaster for those that attend.

Political Party Comparisons

A controversial component of any election has to do with party affiliations. The voting statistics described in Chapter 4 show little national distinction between the total “born again” that register as a Republican or Democrat – obviously the two largest political parties in the United States. How this can be, given the major differences in official positions of each of these parties on moral issues belie either ignorance, apathy or an outright skepticism that the positions do not represent true party commitments. Whichever the case may be, it's valuable to provide comparisons of party positions on those issues that evangelicals consider important. Whether it is abortion, homosexuality, public schools, welfare, taxes, immigration, gun control, etc., each party has documented their platform for all to see.

By doing a little research on party platforms, it's fairly straightforward to tabulate quotes and compare them side-by-side for each issue of interest. The party platforms for presidential election years will provide the most thorough treatment on subjects ranging from local to international. Providing the Biblical perspective on each issue allows an

even more telling understanding of a party's position. For the platforms of third (or fourth...) parties, the same information is generally available. However, the reader is encouraged to review Chapter 6, "Principle vs. Practical" to assess whether this is a desirable inclusion or not.

In documenting a party's position, it's very important to use official information releases as far as possible. This allows a clean, referable audit trail, and removes any opponent's potentially misleading rhetoric. Again, just like addressing ballot measures, a credible effort needs to be expended to ensure integrity of presentation. This includes quoting the clearest representation of a party's stance on an issue, and doing due diligence in finding their position. A partial example is at the end of this section.

Party positions on issues cannot be determinative of individual candidates' views, since they may or may not adhere to their party's official line. However, with an absence of other, more detailed knowledge of a candidate, their party association will show where their general allegiance lies. For local non-partisan elections, such as city or county offices, it is still important to try and determine the candidates' views on moral issues since these offices become the springboard to seeking higher positions of authority in the future. It should be noted that even in non-partisan elections, the political affiliation of many local candidates can be determined by calling the local major party headquarters and asking who they endorse

Example Format for Comparison of Major Party Platforms⁹

Biblical Issue: *Sanctity of Life*

Relevant Verses: *Gen 1:26a, 27; Ex 20:13; Psalm 139:13-16*

Democratic Party:

- “The Democratic Party stands behind the right of every woman to choose, consistent with *Roe v. Wade*, and regardless of ability to pay. We believe it is a fundamental constitutional liberty that individual Americans – not government – can best take responsibility for making the most difficult and intensely personal decisions regarding reproduction. This year’s Supreme Court rulings show to us all that eliminating a woman’s right to choose is only one justice away.”
- “We should allow stem cell research to make important new discoveries”

Republican Party:

- “We recommit ourselves to the values that strengthen the ...dignity of every human life”
- “We oppose abortion, but our pro-life agenda does not include punitive action against women who have an abortion”
- “...the unborn child has a fundamental individual right to life which cannot be infringed. We support a human life amendment to the Constitution and we endorse legislation to make clear that the Fourteenth Amendment’s protections apply to unborn children... We oppose using public revenues for abortion...”

⁹ Excerpts taken from the 2000 Presidential Election Platforms

www.democrats.org & www.rnc.org

Timing of the Evening

Like so many things, timing is crucial. The specific date(s) of the ***Election Pre-View Evening*** needs to be solidified as early as possible. Obviously, a number of activities are required to advertise the event and ensure proper planning is completed. A partial listing of questions needing answers is provided below to stimulate early detailed planning:

- Will this be for one church or are other churches (or groups) going to be invited? If so, which ones and when?
- When and how should other churches or groups be contacted to participate in planning?
- When would an organizing committee need to begin work?
- What night of the week is the best to gain the greatest participation?
- How many ***Election Pre-View Evenings*** should there be? Should they be conducted in different regions but with the same material?
- How long before the Election should the evening be conducted? How many Sundays should there be between the ***Election Pre-View Evening*** and the election?
- When will voter guides be available so they can be handed out?
- When is the last day to register to vote?
- When is the last day to vote by absentee ballot?
- When should a voter registration table be set up at church?
- When would a web site of all information be available?
- When will all handout materials be printed?
- When will firm commitments be gained for any invited organizations? How much space will they require?
- When should candidates be contacted?
- How many Sundays should bulletin inserts announcing the ***Election Pre-View Evening*** be provided?
- How often should a public announcement be made in church to advertise the evening?
- When and how should other churches be invited to attend?
- When should local news outlets be contacted to advertise the event?
- When will State and local ballot measures be known?
- How long will presenters be given to research positions on ballot measures?
- When will dry-runs of all presentations be conducted?
- When will the post-presentation meeting for “lessons learned” be?

Follow-Through

The most critical portions of the ***Election Pre-View Evening*** are the presentations and handout material covering any ballot measures. However, equipping Christians to be godly citizens shouldn't be a single night of

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lectures once every two years. Besides information tables relating to active, Christ-honoring organizations described above, and voter guides (described in Chapter 9 below) other handouts would be very appropriate. These include:

- URL's of sites supportive of sound Christian positions
- Listing of local elected officials and their contact information (address, e-mail, FAX, phone numbers, legislative or representative district)
- Maps of legislative districts to show which ones a person resides in
- Bibliography of recommended books to read
- Listing of magazines and periodicals for subscription that will provide a continuing opportunity to keep informed
- Point papers on specific issues from a Biblical worldview perspective
- Copies of the Declaration of Independence and Constitution of the United States
- Sign-up sheets for an e-mail distribution alert network to be set up to inform and equip Christians of events, legislation, and activities of interest
- Sign-up sheets for volunteers to support voter registration drives
- Evening evaluation forms (to be turned in)
- Participation sign-up cards to gauge interest in further direct involvement (to be turned in)

Finally, it's very important for the organizing committee to meet soon after the event to review lessons learned. This is a critical time to document questions like: what could be improved upon for next time, what should be retained, what comments were written on the comment sheets, what comments were overheard, what follow-up will be done with those that desire to participate further, etc. Each time an activity like this is tried, it will become more refined, more comfortable, and more productive. The natural inclination is to become discouraged if there is not as much enthusiasm or follow through as expected. Remember, this is something new, and there's a generation of isolationist thinking to be overcome. True change will require patience, reliance upon the Lord to grant His favor, and a clear vision of what is to be accomplished.

Finally, it's important to give a formal report to the host church and the church providing pastoral oversight (if different) of what was accomplished, lessons learned, and any follow-on activities being planned.

9 *Voter Guides?*

“The sins of some men are obvious, reaching the place of judgment ahead of them; the sins of others trail behind them. In the same way, good deeds are obvious, and even those that are not cannot be hidden.” (1 Tim 5:24-25)

Many churches use voter guides to inform their membership of stances candidates have taken on issues viewed as important to the Christian community. Though challenged legally over the years, guides that treat all candidates equally with the same questions are able to continue to develop, publish and distribute their material each election. Like any aid used to help make a decision, guides need to be objectively evaluated along with other information. This chapter addresses advantages and disadvantages of guides, not to trivialize their importance, but to help place them in their proper context.

Advantages of Voter Guides

- Without them, there is generally an appalling lack of objective investigation made into candidates and their positions on moral issues (Acts 6:3)
- They provide a consistent level of information about each candidate seeking office as well as selected ballot measures (Job 13:9, 1 Tim 3:1-13)
- Each candidate’s position is addressed as accurately as possible on issues of importance to the Christian community (Prov 5:21; Matt 6:33)
- They address moral issues that will give insights into the candidates’ true character and decision predisposition (Matt 7:15-20)
- They provide accountability of the candidate’s positions on issues so comparisons can be made with their record in office afterwards (Ecc 5:1-7)
- Many times a small percentage change in voting patterns can have significant impact on the results. Guides can be the deciding factor
- They provide a common format of response from all candidates uncluttered with rhetoric (Prov 10:19a)
- They can provide a focus for the Christian community in the vacuum of anything else available
- They provide a convenient summary that can be taken into polling booths

Possible Shortcomings of Voter Guides

- Experience of the candidate for office is generally not addressed. The user still needs to read about and calibrate on their qualifications (Prov 22:29; Rom 12:6-8)
- Only a selected group of issues/questions is covered. These may or may not be the ones of greatest concern to you, though some will be

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- Past candidate history does not ensure continued, consistent stance on a particular subject (bait and switch)(Psalm 118:8-9)
- A solid moral stance may not imply expertise to operate effectively within the political structure, but it does help assess whether they are willing to stand for a righteous goal (Acts 4:13)
- Some candidates may not have responded in time, or it was lost, therefore inadvertently giving the impression of refusing to respond
- Sometimes the full text of the question asked of each candidate is not available, only a short summary statement of the issue. This provides little opportunity to determine if it was a fair question or not
- There is no opportunity for the candidate to give the reason for their response to a question, however, a solid "yes" or "no" could mean a great deal since the candidate is willing to commit one way or another and not waffle (Matt 5:37)
- Voting records are not necessarily indicative of a person's stance, since proposed legislation may have had other "riders" that were offensive and caused the entire bill to be rejected
- Use of the guide can become a crutch for a voter to lean on, instead of doing their own homework (Prov 21:5)
- When organizations endorse candidates or ballot measures, they are generally single issue focused and may miss a larger context. Also, many endorsements are provided strictly because of contributions made to the organization – not because of deeply held convictions
- Some guides use conservative (or objective) sounding names to disguise their actual biased leaning (e.g., Nonpartisan Candidate Evaluation Group)

Besides certain well recognized Voter Guides, there are other sources of information you'll probably receive either within or outside your church environment. Whatever you have, it's important for you to do your own homework. One of the greatest failings of many voting Christians is that after waiting until the last minute, they pull out their trusty Voter Guides, and expect them to define exactly what to do. This may be better than being swayed by last minute TV and radio candidate blitzes making "startling" new claims, but it isn't fulfilling our responsibilities to be an informed voter.

10 *Prayer for Those in Authority Over Us*

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Phil 4:6-7)

Scripture gives very direct commands concerning our responsibilities towards the authorities God has raised over us. Romans 13:1-7 summarizes a number of key principles by stating we are to submit to them, and also give respect and honor where due (see also 1 Peter 2:13-17). We have another precious privilege and duty before the Lord, and that is to pray for those leaders as they exercise the power and authority God has placed into their hands. As 1 Timothy 2:1-2 states:

“I urge therefore, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone - for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.”

Since this is such an obvious desire of God for us, the question then becomes what to specifically pray for so we will experience quiet and peaceful lives, while setting a Christ-honoring example of salt and light. The following list gives examples of the type of prayers that are appropriate, and that should permeate our thinking¹⁰.

- Pray for the salvation of each in authority over us
- Pray they would understand it is ultimately God who has placed them in their position, not man
- Pray they would understand their personal accountability to an Almighty God to whom they'll give account
- Pray they would see themselves as servants of God first and would diligently seek His will
- Pray they and their family would be protected from any harm or injury
- Pray they would legislate righteously, according to God's standard and not man's
- Pray they would appoint righteous, honest and fair judges
- Pray they would align their lives with biblical standards of leadership
- Pray they would use biblical principles to guide all their decisions
- Pray they would be diligent to seek out wise and godly counsel before making decisions

¹⁰ Scripture verses supporting the above: 1 Tim 2:1-8; Matt 7:21-23; Acts 4:19-20; Col 1:29; Rom 13:1-6; 1 Peter 2:15; Prov 12:24; 20:12; 18:15; 24:5-6; 25:12; 29:12

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- Pray they would be honest and exercise integrity in their official capacity
- Pray they would be above reproach, with integrity in their private lives
- Pray they would govern according to the truth, even when it's not popular
- Pray they would be examples of righteousness to those they serve
- Pray they would be good stewards of all the resources God has placed in their hands
- Pray that they would have a clear understanding of the role of government according to God's design and not man's
- Pray they would have the necessary discernment to immediately recognize evil and to reject it
- Pray they would use their office to restrain evil
- Pray they would publicly and privately commend what is good
- Pray they would create an environment supportive to the spread of the gospel
- Pray they would see their role as one that is to benefit those they serve
- Pray they would not make decisions out of expediency, but based on what is right and just
- Pray they would not be led gradually or deceptively into compromising righteous positions
- Pray they would not listen to ungodly counselors or self serving groups
- Pray they would not become proud because of their position of authority
- Pray they would not shrink from fulfilling their God given responsibilities
- Pray they would not abuse the power which God has entrusted to them
- Pray they would not promote evil in any manner
- Pray they would not use their office to promote their own agenda
- Pray they would not use their office to promote their own popularity

Let's not forget those Christians that are not in leadership positions; they also need to be prayed for. Beseech God that they would fulfill their responsibilities diligently, and answer God's call to be involved and even seek public office to personally present and live to the righteous standard the culture around us needs to see lived out. Specifically, then, consider the following additional prayers:

- Pray that Christians would faithfully pray for those in authority over us
- Pray that Christians would be an encouragement to our leaders to do good
- Pray that Christians would exercise their right to vote, and will use it in a godly manner
- Pray that when God calls His people to be involved in politics, they would obey and be diligent
- Pray that God would raise up godly leaders to replace those that abuse the use of their power

11 *Practical Initiatives a Church Christian Citizenship Ministry Can Do*

“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.” (Gal 6:9-10)

Any quick search of the literature will find a number of organizations that have lists of activities and pro-active actions that can be used to make a difference. Besides the main thrust of this pamphlet, the conduct of an *Election Pre-View Evening*, the following is a short list of specific actions a Christian Citizenship group within a church environment can pursue to make a difference. It is roughly in chronological (growth) order, moving from an internal perspective (organization and oversight) to eventually reaching outside the confines of a church and collaborating with other fellowships. This is obviously an artificial structure, since any Christian organization can do what they deem appropriate according to their time constraints and priorities.

It’s important in choosing activities, however, that the amount of commitments not exceed the ability to accomplish. Once a church becomes energized, there’s a tendency to believe everything must be done immediately. This will only breed frustration and disappointment early on – which can lead to completely frustrating any organized approach. Prayerfully consider what your particular volunteer labor force is gifted to do, and pace yourself to build upon previous lessons learned. Finally, consider any activity with a long term perspective such that any difficulty in obtaining “success” does not completely dishearten efforts. Remember, the Lord only calls us to be faithful in our service to Him, the results will be dependent upon His gracious will (1 Cor 3:6).

Relative to Church Leadership

- Ensure church leadership provides oversight of all activities and significant decisions. They must ensure the name of Christ remains honored in all that is done
- Ensure there is a firm understanding of all legal issues involved. Seek legal counsel if uncertain
- Develop a formal church policy towards Christian Citizenship (if necessary)

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- Develop modest (realistic) goals and objectives for a specified time period and reassess periodically
- Identify a mature, experienced church point of contact to coordinate all activities, lead meetings, report to church leadership and be the spokesman

Providing for Believer Education

- Prepare for and conduct specialized training classes (topical) or retreats for interested people
- Work with the pastor to outline an appropriate topical sermon series
- Generate a Sunday School Christian Citizenship class series
- Conduct a Home Fellowship Group Bible study on citizenship issues
- Create a permanent Citizenship library or set up a table or bulletin board during worship times with information of current interest
- Publish or route fact sheets, booklets etc. on specific topics
- Create a Christian Citizenship budget line within the church annual budget for education materials (books, videos, tapes, periodicals, etc.)
- Subscribe to election and legislation alerts from reputable Christian organizations and post in conspicuous place to increase awareness
- Educate church membership on success stories with inserts in bulletins
- Create a group E-mail distribution capability for interested members
- Encourage voter registration and provide materials to facilitate
- Invite political leaders to give their personal testimony and/or to discuss issues of concern with the membership
- Conduct voter awareness evenings on any number of general or specific items of interest as a continuing education and equipping ministry
- Develop a phone directory for all members listing the districts they are located in, all elected representatives and contact information
- Encourage school children to write school reports on the Christian roots and influences in our nations history

Direct Outreach

- Build an advertising campaign (radio, billboards, other?) to address local issues from a Biblical perspective
- Organize and conduct writing classes to equip members on how to write effective letters to public officials, newspapers, corporations, etc.
- Organize and conduct letter writing workshops to produce letters to the editor, elected officials, TV executives, industry executives, etc.
- Develop and build Web sites containing reasoned positions on topics of particular interest. Use hot links to trusted Christian sites for easy access
- Encourage pastoral mentoring of current and future community leaders
- Organize visitation of elected representatives to voice opinions on topics of interest and concern to the Christian community

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- Organize picketing, demonstrations, boycotts if needed (however, conduct all within legal constraints)
- Develop a publications and pamphlet ministry to produce and deliver reasoned positions on moral issues to the community

Possible Joint Church Activities

- Conduct joint church coordination/awareness meetings on current issues of interest to the wider Christian community
- Sponsor joint church seminars or workshops for specific topics
- Pursue a vigorous information exchange and collaboration process
- Host candidate forums during election years to allow all candidates for an office to: speak on issues, give their personal testimony, answer questions
- Develop joint church resolutions on moral issues
- Form an advisory group to express concerns and encouragement to local, state and national leaders
- Pool financial resources to support ad campaigns if needed
- Identify specific expertise (e.g., geneticist) to provide reasoned answers to all collaborating churches when questions arise in that area

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12 ***Endnote: Why Don't We Get Involved?***

“The sluggard says, ‘There is a lion outside!’, or ‘I will be murdered in the streets!’” (Prov 22:13)

“Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe.” (Prov 29:25)

One of the primary reasons for this pamphlet is to provide a starting point for churches to equip their members to be active, concerned, politically involved citizens at the minimum level. I believe voting is the least a Christian can do and have a direct impact upon our society's laws and the selection of those that will rule over us. Surprisingly, many Christians will not even exercise this right, much less pro-actively engage government and our culture at all levels.

Personally, I believe there are Biblical, wisdom, and practical reasons to not overlook this part of our responsibility before the Lord. In so doing, we help to demonstrate our love for our neighbors and accomplish much for their and our good. Over the years, however, I've heard many reasons for not engaging our culture and fighting the good fight for righteousness sake. The following lists the most common ones, and gives answers to each. I invite you to assess for yourself whether any of these excuses are valid, or whether they are self-justification for our own selfish reasons.

- ***I don't see any direct Biblical mandate to be involved***
 - We are called to be salt and light in this world. In it's broadest context, this includes not just spreading and applying God's truths, but also disinfecting the environment around us, personally setting an example on involvement, and working for the good of our neighbor (Matt 5:13-16)
 - We are called to point out sin in the land (Eph 5:11)
 - We are called to hold captive every thought unto Christ in every area of endeavor, including selecting leaders and righteous laws (2 Cor 10:5)
 - We are called to demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, however it manifests itself (2 Cor 10:5)
 - We are called to pray and work for peace and prosperity in the land (Jer 29:7)
 - We are called to be prepared to answer for the hope that is in us (1 Peter 3:15)
 - We are called to rescue those being led away to death in their own sin (Prov 24:11-12)

- ***I know only the gospel can change a heart, not social activism***
 - True enough. However, God has placed a conscience inside everyone (Rom 2:14). This conscience can be quickened by exposure to God's righteous standard of good and evil (Gal 3:24)
 - Just laws may not change a person's heart, but they can serve to change a person's actions. Otherwise, why do we teach our children right from wrong even before they may come to saving faith in Jesus Christ?

- ***I don't think making a "better" pagan will bring more glory to God***
 - True! The pagan is still lost in his sin and a reproach to God
 - Godly implementation of God's standard brings honor to God independent of the results in the non-believer
 - The standard shows that no matter how hard a person tries, they'll still fall short (no matter how poor of a reflection it is of God's truth), and will need something else
 - A pagan that is morally "good" will bring credit to the moral standard conformed to as well as the source of that standard

- ***Why should I want to improve Satan's world***
 - To contribute to the peace and prosperity of the land (Jer 29:7)
 - To be able to live quiet lives in all godliness and holiness (1 Tim 2:1-2)
 - To show compassion on the lost, but never at the expense of the gospel message (Heb 13:2; Luke 10:25-37)
 - To prevent open dishonor to God's name amongst the non-Christianized (Num 14:13-16)
 - Although it appears that Satan holds sway over this world, it truly belongs to the Lord (Psalm 24:1)
 - The upholding of God's standard could be the vehicle the Lord uses to show the depth of one's sin (lawbreaker) and lead them to the only hope they have, Christ (Gal 3:24; Rom 7:7-25)

- ***I may have to compromise on an issue if I start to take a stance***
 - Realistically, is it better to do nothing and watch the culture and environment we raise our children in become more and more hostile to everything we stand for?
 - We must determine the principles we're not willing to compromise on under any circumstances. This, however, does not prevent us from incrementally working towards a righteous goal
 - Is limiting some types of abortion better than no limitations at all? Is this compromising on a foundational principle?

Equipping the Church to Vote

- Are we really only straining a gnat to ensure we can justify inaction? (Matt 23:23-24)
- Obviously, we must be careful of our motives at all times. But we're not to be so careful that we are frozen into inaction
- ***I don't have enough information or knowledge to be effective (I'm ignorant)***
 - How do you correct this? By staying ignorant or by studying and becoming knowledgeable
 - Common sense itself will show what should be done many times
 - Did you use the same argument to prevent yourself from sharing the gospel once you became a believer?
 - God's common grace gives man a conscience to understand at least a shadow of what is good and bad, independent of the facts (consequences)
 - Being armed with data and good reasoning makes us even more powerful, however, this isn't a prerequisite before we do anything
- ***I'm not supposed to throw pearls before swine***
 - For sure, we are not called to be argumentative or divisive (Matt 7:6; Acts 18:6 example)
 - Not all unbelievers will be unreceptive (or cold) to solid information, facts and good reasoning, as long as we are not personally the stumbling block to them
 - How then would you fulfill 2 Corinthians 10:4 which says we demolish every argument and pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God? We should at least be aware of the "swine's" arguments
 - By the way, the swine referred to in Matthew 7:6 are those that God's truths are wasted on to our own detriment. We for sure must be wise about where to pick our fight
 - Is this really just an excuse to not engage the enemy at all?
- ***I'm not gifted to be involved in politics or Christian activism - so why should I worry about it?***
 - Just as with spiritual giftedness (1 Cor 12:1-31), you'll only know if you're gifted (talented) in this area by trying, then evaluating
 - You know that there will be others that are gifted and talented in these areas, your responsibility is to seek them out to support them in: prayer, financially as the Lord leads, encouragement, defense of them (speak well of them), voluntary work where needed, and the like (1 Tim 5:18)
 - Also, seek those out that are involved in order to be better informed on the issues of the day and what role you can or should play (Rom 12:6-8)

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- Ignoring those involved in positions of authority and not supporting them could be knowing the good we ought to do but not doing it (James 4:17)
- ***I'm not taught to engage the culture***
 - What should you do then?
 - If your church does not have the resources, how can you help provide for them?
 - If you don't engage, who will?
 - While you become equipped, support those that are gifted in these areas
- ***I'm not directly affected by the issues of the day***
 - Maybe not at this time, but what about your children? (Prov 6:10-11)
 - Is darkness ever satisfied with the status quo?
 - Is this showing love to our neighbor and a concern for his well being?
 - What example did the Good Samaritan set (Luke 10:25-37)? Even though not "required" to help those in need, what would bring the greatest glory to Christ?
- ***I don't believe it's appropriate to impose my views on others***
 - God has revealed His moral standards and expectations for both believers and for humanity at large (Deut 4:5-8)
 - For example, before the fall:
 - ◆ The sanctity of life was to be maintained (Gen 1:27,28)
 - ◆ The sanctity of marriage was to be preserved (Gen 2:23,24)
 - ◆ Man was given dominion over the earth (Gen 1:28; 2:15)
 - ◆ Man was made aware of his accountability to an almighty God (Gen 2:16)
 - After the fall:
 - ◆ The law of Moses was given to His people for their good, and as a testimony to the world (Deut 4:5-8; Psalm 96:1-13; 98:2,3)
 - ◆ Man's conscience continues to display the requirements of the law (Rom 2:14-15) and the existence of a mighty God that he is accountable to (Rom 1:20)
 - Because of this:
 - ◆ It is observable that turning from God's moral and visible truths (violating them, and our own conscience) will result in adverse consequences and will potentially yield devastating results (Joshua 1:7 principle; Rom 1:21-32)
 - ◆ Objective data and information (as well as observation) will usually show the horrible consequences of sin (Deut 28:1-68)

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- We cannot force another to believe a certain way, but we may convince them of their folly (even AA, some human psychology, and self help courses show some "improvement" can occur)
- You typically cannot impose your views on someone else, but you can affect a person's actions and behavior
- Government's role is to punish the evil doer, by doing so it's imposing it's will on people. Who is going to define what evil is if you don't?
- ***I don't think I can make any difference***
 - How many apostles were there? Did they make a difference in the world?
 - Don't we serve the God of the universe? Who holds the life of the king in His hand? (Prov 21:1)
 - Who's in charge? We can't do anything by ourselves, but God can!
 - We're not called to guarantee results, we are only called to be faithful to the high calling the Lord gives us
 - If God is for us, who can be against us? (Rom 8:31-39)
- ***I'm afraid of the impacts upon myself or my family that could result from engaging the enemy***
 - Is this rationalization? We are called to count the cost in our obedience to Christ, not our own comfort (Matt 16:24)
 - We are not called to fear man (Prov 29:25)
 - We are not called to imagine false enemies to get out of doing what is right (Prov 22:13)
 - We must be wise where we take our fight, but fight we must (Matt 16:18)
 - If the gates of hell will not prevail against God's kingdom, His church, then why are we so reluctant to bring the righteousness of Christ and God's truths into the public square? (Matt 16:15-19)
- ***I don't have the time***
 - Do you have time for any TV, radio, hobbies, vacations, naps, sports, pleasure reading?
 - Do you seem to always find the time for those things that you enjoy doing?
 - Is this only an excuse to do absolutely nothing in this area?

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- ***I think it's illegal for a church to be involved in politics in any way***
 - All scripture was given to equip us for every good work (1 Tim 3:16-17), independent of what the government says the church is supposed to do or not do
 - The church, with its teachers and preachers is intended to train and equip us in doing the good works (Eph 4:11-5:14)
 - Federal law prevents 501(c)3 organizations from actively trying to influence the outcome of elections. However, churches can educate their members in their Christian citizenship responsibilities and provide a forum for political discussion and debate as long as it doesn't favor one candidate over another or take a formal, church stand on a legislative issue not directly affecting the church

- ***I believe politics is corrupt, sleazy, and beyond redeeming, why even worry about it?***
 - All legitimate businesses and professions can be redeemed and prosper for God's glory (John 21:4-11; 2 Cor 9:6-7)
 - The Lord is the one that places men in positions of authority to do His bidding (Prov 8:15-16; 21:1)
 - Replacing evil men with godly men will bring righteousness to the forefront (Prov 25:4-5; 28:28)
 - Justice, properly applied, ensures order in the land (Prov 28:2; 29:2,4,14)
 - There is always hope in the Lord, even men of little account can be used for His glory and to fulfill His purposes (Eccl 9:4)

- ***I think this generation is totally lost and beyond hope, it's not like the old days, and we can't return, so why should I be concerned about it?***
 - The old days were just as evil as now since the heart of man has not changed (Jer 17:9)
 - The old days were seen by us through the eyes of a child, we cannot go back to that time, nor should we even try and compare the times (1 Cor 13:11)
 - It's not wise to dwell on the "old days" and pine for them, since we live in this day and are called to live it for the glory of God (Eccl 7:10). It's never beyond hope, God will accomplish His purposes to bring Him praise and glory (1 Cor 6:9-11)

- ***I agree individual Christians have a responsibility to be active in this nation, but is it valid for the church body to be involved?***
 - The primary focus of the church body is to present Christ in His fullness, to build the body of believers up in their faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, and to present Christ to the world (Eph 3:10-11; Matt 28:18-20)
 - Just as removal of God from the public school teaches that God is not important, the church body by not addressing citizenship duties teaches that it is not important (benign neglect)
 - The church with its gifted teachers and preachers is to equip all believers to be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Tim 3:16,17), this includes being salt and light in every legitimate profession and sphere of influence in society (public schools, elected officials, etc)
 - In order to serve in a godly way in public service, it is important to properly equip the godly to assume these positions for God's glory and know how to apply Biblical principles to these professions, since they're serving the Lord not men (Eph 6:7)

- ***I know the Christian is called to do good and evangelize in this world, but is he called to confront evil and fraud wherever they are found?***
 - We are to have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather, we are to expose them. This for sure applies to professing believers, but the principle can also be applied to the world (Eph 5:8-14)
 - John the Baptist exposed King Herod's sin publicly (Mark 6:17-18)
 - The law is intended to control the ungodly, and everything that is contrary to the glorious gospel (1 Tim 1:8-11)
 - If a believer is in a leadership position, he is called to root out evil from his presence (Prov 20:26)
 - Even Christ Himself drove out the money changers from His father's house (Matt 21:12-13)
 - If a Christian will not stand up for what is right, who will?

What other ones can you think of that apply to you? For each one, can you truthfully come before the Lord and say you have no role in selecting the best person to rule over you when our government asks who you want? Can you truthfully say it's not your duty before God to hold up His righteous standard and define for others what constitutes good and evil when the government asks you to define it? Our Lord calls on us to count the cost of following Him (Matt 16:24). How much longer will this nation rely upon the Christian legacy it has inherited from previous generations?

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That heritage bought, and maintained our freedoms at an enormous price. I believe Christians in this nation have for too long withdrawn from the gates of hell and have not attacked them (Matt 10:34-39). We have allowed ourselves to be marginalized in influence, and to be seen as irrelevant to the issues crowding all around us. How prevalent must evil become before we say “enough is enough” and begin to take a stand in the public square, knowledgably, with humility, with compassion and love for those who have bought into lies in our absence?

May the Lord grant you wisdom to do what is right, and to take those first steps to fulfill this part of our Christian walk in this nation. May He grant you the wisdom to have proper balance in everything you attempt to do. And may all of our efforts be used of God to prepare the soil around us so that it will ripen unto a great harvest for Christ’s kingdom.

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Disclaimer

The contents of this pamphlet reflect the views of the author only, and are not to be construed as official positions of Grace Bible Church of Escondido CA. Shepherding oversight of this publication was provided by the Elders of Grace Bible Church to ensure that Christ was honored, but not to verify that all potentially legal factors were thoroughly addressed.

The author has tried to be balanced and accurate in representing what individuals can do to exercise their citizenship rights within the context of a church environment. The sad state of legal confusion that exists in this nation, however, makes any activity “out of the norm” expected for churches to immediately be suspect. Acknowledging this situation, throughout this pamphlet there was a scrupulous distinction made between individuals and their activities and opinions (currently legal), and those that would constitute a formal position by a church (existing legal limitations).

Should there be any doubt what would be legally allowable activities for a church with a 501(c)3 status, church leadership is encouraged to seek professional counsel.

Feedback

Comments and suggestions concerning this pamphlet are encouraged to be sent to the below e-mail or snail-mail address. To receive additional copies, a small donation of any size to cover printing and postage costs would be appreciated, but is not required.

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